

Treat Employees With Respect

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Urgent care is a “service” business that provides patients with an “experience”—similar in many ways to retail stores, restaurants, hotels, airlines and banks. “People” are required to deliver urgent care services and unlike manufacturing where the product is something “tangible,” patients judge the “quality” of their urgent care experiences *not only* by clinical outcomes *but also* by how their interactions with front and back office staff, providers, and billing make them “feel.” If an urgent care center is to deliver experiences that will cause patients to not only want to return themselves but to tell friends and family to do likewise, it must invest in its people.

When an employee goes to work for somebody else, he is selling that person his time, skills, and expertise. The opportunity cost is that the employee could work elsewhere (including for a competitor); become self-employed; pursue education, family or personal interests; or not work. The more valuable an employee’s training, knowledge, connections, work ethic, personality and other factors—the greater his opportunity costs of accepting a paycheck. As a “people” business—an urgent care center can’t deliver great patient experiences with staff who has limited options but rather, should seek to attract the highest quality employees—those who have a hundred of other opportunities they could be pursuing if not working at the center.

As a “people” business—the goal of the urgent care operator should be to attract and retain the “best” available employees suited for each position. There are many philosophies as to how this occurs—popularized as “corporate culture.” The problem with the term “culture,” however, is that it can be nebulous, contrived, and devoid of actionable meaning. A great mission statement is quickly undermined by a manager who sees employees as “subjects” to be acted upon or as “faceless cogs” in a bureaucratic machine. Culture manifests in human interactions. Contrast the behaviors of the two managers in Table 1. The first treats employees with integrity, consistency and transparency—celebrating employee contributions and holding individuals responsible for personal results. While the second loses employee trust by being unpredictable, gossiping, blaming, defensive, and biased.

Table 1: Positive and Negative Manager Behaviors.

Accountable for Individual and Collective Results Engaged and Enthusiastic Teams Personal Integrity Consistency, Clear Direction, Transparency Ownership of Behavior and Results Manages Downward, Focuses on Developing Staff Taking Initiative Acknowledging Reality and Tackling Problems Acting in the Best Interest of the Business Anticipating Problems Before They Occur Gaining Insight from Regular, Ongoing Feedback	versus	Victimization and Blame-gaming Employee Loss of Spirit and Resolve Malicious Gossip, Workplace Bullying, and Sexual Harassment Inconsistency, Confusion and Hidden Agendas Blaming Others for Failure Manages Upward, Focuses on Pleasing Superiors Waiting for Direction from Others Denying Responsibility, Not Knowing What to Do Covering Your Tail, Acting in Your Own Best Interests Waiting and Seeing if Situations Resolve on Their Own Ignoring or Denying Issues
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The most effective managers are those who show respect for their people through positive, proactive, and accountable behaviors that avoid the “basest” of human instincts. What differentiates “A-quality” from “C-quality” managers is how well they put aside personal agendas, understand the “right” of individuals to be treated morally and ethically, and actively acknowledge employees’ “worth” as human beings.

Table 2: Dignity and Respect

Dignity: Concept that a human being has an <i>innate right</i> to moral and ethical treatment.	Respect: Showing deference for a person’s <i>innate worth</i> , personal qualities, position, rights or privileges.
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Recognizing each employee's dignity and treating him or her with respect is critical to retaining good workers, especially as the job market strengthens. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, demand for Medical Assistants (median pay \$28,860) will increase by 31% over the next 10 years—resulting in a workforce shortage of 126,900 skilled individuals. For licensed vocational nurses (\$40,380), demand is expected to rise by 22%, creating a shortage of 168,500 workers. And for practice managers (\$84,270), demand will likewise rise by 22% resulting in a shortage of 68,000 workers. The pending dearth of skilled workers should put additional emphasis around the need for employee retention.

Statistics show that employees who feel they are *not treated* with dignity and respect by their managers are three times more likely to leave their jobs within two years. Turnover can cost a business up to 100% of an employee's salary in overtime, recruiting, on-boarding, training, customer retention, and productivity costs. Moreover, turnover damages a manager's credibility with remaining staff, affecting their enthusiasm and productivity. By contrast, when employees feel a manager celebrates their accomplishments, values their contributions, and encourages their development—they take on additional projects, arrive early and stay late, go out of their way to “wow” customers, and speak positively about the business.

The bottom line—acknowledging employees' dignity and treating them with respect has a direct impact on an urgent care center's long-term success.